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ABSTRACT

Twelve federal migrant programs currently provide over $600 million annually to assist migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their families. Four programs (the Migrant Education Program, Migrant Head Start, Migrant Health, and job training and ancillary services under the Job Training Partnership Act) account for 90 percent of federal migrant assistance funds. Yet, these programs are engaged in a Sisyphean task because they focus on helping individuals attain a better life (outside the fields) but do nothing to reform farm labor-market conditions. This book describes the evolution and current operations of the four major migrant programs, and offers suggestions for three tiers of reform. Introductory chapters provide a history of the role of the migrant worker in U.S. agriculture, and of public policy that has perpetuated the menial conditions of the farm labor market. Program descriptions cover initial and current objectives, definition of target population, eligibility criteria, program operations, funding, current issues, and coordination with other programs. Three levels of reform are recommended: (1) over the short term, improving program coordination at the national level; (2) over the medium term, improving data on farmworkers by requiring interagency agreement on core definitions and clear assignment to a single agency of data collection responsibility; and (3) over the longer term, deliberately creating public policy that would improve conditions for migrant workers. The most effective policy step would be reducing the number of workers competing for farm jobs through enforcement of immigration and labor laws. Appendices contain the text of recommendations by the Administrative Conference of the United States on migrant program coordination and data collection; a directory of organizations and federal programs providing migrant services; data on farmworker wages, employment, and production; and a glossary of acronyms. This book contains an index and many data tables and figures. (SV)